most of whom belonged to the Quasimi clan, of which the Sheikh of Sharjah is the titular head. I have had many a joke with Sheikh Sultan and his nobles over stories of the old piratical days, and they were greatly amused to learn that my great-great-grandfather, who entered the Royal Navy as a midshipman in 1789, had taken part in a sortie against Sharjah in 1830, when his frigate shelled the town as a reprisal against a murderous attack on a British merchantman. I shall refer later to the history of piracy in Oman which, on account of the predatory raids on shipping, gained the title of 'the Pirate Coast' in the last century.

The town of Sharjah is built on the shores of the creek, the contour of which it follows in crescent shape until the open sea is reached; at low tide a spit of sand or 'bar', separates the creek from the Gulf. Only at low tide is it possible to cross the creek on foot and make the journey to Khan; on the far side of this sand-bridge or 'bar' there is a primitive wooden lighthouse, built by the sheikh for the guidance of the pearling boats, and a small colony of fishermen's huts. The residences of the merchants, which are all two-storeyed buildings with wide verandas and imposing gateways, are built facing the sea, a distinct advantage in the hot weather. When a breeze is blowing, they are cooler inside in the summer months than an air-conditioned room at the Fort, and much more pleasant.

The town is about half a mile in length, and an eighth of a mile wide, with narrow, crooked streets running through the centre, and quaint, dark alleyways formed by the back walls of the houses. I could never get accustomed to the twists and curves of these streets, some of which were wide enough for only two people to pass abreast, although the Arabs used to ride donkeys and camels through them. Little doorways would suddenly open in the walls, whilst from a window high up would descend a cascade of refuse or dirty water. Some of these doorways are extremely beautiful; shaped like the double doors of an old English church, they are set in a frame of decorated stone, and the unvarnished teak is studded with pointed brass knobs. Sometimes they are inset with a secondary door, large enough to admit one person.

One afternoon I accompanied the Station Engineer, Sparkes, to Sharjah on a shopping expedition; we took a mechanic, Mahmud, with us to act as interpreter. Sparkes wanted to haggle with one of the merchants, and rather impolitely declined to rely on my Arabic. He had recently purchased an old Arab seal, a large, oval

2: O'Shea G-3 (1944-1945) 1947 MK4 Trucial Oman MK4

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The Khan Bahadur bin Razzak, British Residency Agent, Trucial Oman, standing in front of the magnificent Persian doorway of his house in Sharjah

following p 140 (b)